

possessors would have meant the overthrow of Bonaparte's still insecure power. So he treated the suppliants with contemptuous disdain. What he had done was done. They were home once more and might remain, if subservient: otherwise their existence was their own affair. In the perspective of St. Helena he thought he had erred; that he might have assembled all the considerable estates still in state ownership and have distributed them in bits to former proprietors. Possibly and yet improbably he might have conciliated a large constituency of the social and ecclesiastical hierarchy for use in the empire. In this thought the history of France has measurably justified his regrets. But in fact he put the old stock of the nobility in a place far below the middle and upper burghers who rallied to his support. It was a choice of enemies, and he chose radicals and royalists. They accepted the challenge and met the fate of conspirators.